



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Statement on the U.S. General Election**

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
November 11, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes the OSCE Election Observation Mission's preliminary findings on the U.S. general election, which were issued on November 4.

These findings reflect the professionalism and objectivity which OSCE, in particular ODIHR, brought to bear on the U.S. election observation activities.

They also note that the November 2 U.S. elections "were conducted in an environment that reflects a long democratic tradition, including institutions governed by the rule of law, free and professional media and civil society involvement in all aspects of the election process."

The United States takes note of the problems and the initial recommendations presented in the OSCE Election Observation Mission's preliminary findings, and will consider them carefully.

We note that U.S. citizens and organizations share many of the observation mission's concerns, and that the conduct of the elections is the subject of very healthy, constant and intense debate and scrutiny in our country.

The U.S. delegation addressed the issue of the status of international observers at the November 4 Permanent Council meeting.

The U.S. Government worked diligently – and, I think, to the satisfaction of most, if not all – to facilitate cooperation between international observers and appropriate state and local election officials. We are pleased that the Election Observation Mission noted during its November 4 briefing that it received sufficient access "to carry out its mandate."

In line with our constitutional structure, which affords broad autonomy to state and local governments to conduct elections, we will continue to inform appropriate officials about the role of international election observers, as well as of U.S. commitments within the OSCE and the work of this Organization.

As the OSCE observation mission itself found, the 2002 Help America Vote Act has had a positive impact on the U.S. election system. Its implementation is ongoing, with the deadline for accomplishing a variety of reforms being ahead of us here on January 1, 2006.

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission has also launched a survey on the November 2 general election to collect data on a variety of election-related topics, including voter registration, voting equipment and poll workers.

This data will be analyzed by the Election Assistance Commission as the basis of its report to the United States Congress on the status of election administration in the United States.

As the Help America Vote Act continues to be implemented, and as the Election Assistance Commission and state election bodies study the 2004 general election, we are confident that matters that were raised in the OSCE observation mission's preliminary findings will be fully and adequately addressed.

The U.S. electoral system will, however, remain decentralized. We note that the OSCE Election Observation Mission expressed concern about the impact of this decentralization on different aspects of the electoral process.

The United States believes strongly that its federal system of government brings democracy closest to the people.

As long as electoral procedures in the various states and District of Columbia meet requirements, it is the prerogative of those jurisdictions and their citizens to devise systems that best meet their needs.

The United States would like to thank the OSCE Election Observation Mission and ODIHR for good cooperation in the past months.

We look forward to receiving the Election Observation Mission's final report as soon as it's prepared.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.